

wisdom in asking for help

the soundness of an action or decision when determining if assistance is needed



How to Know When You Should Figure it Out as You Go (and When You Should Ask for Help)

Navigating workplace decisions can be stressful. There are many conflicting messages about how to be a professional. Be proactive, but also measured. Take initiative, but also collaborate. “Just figure it out,” but also, “know what you don’t know.” And no one wants to be that person who asks for help too often, when they *should* do it on their own.

Small wonder that sometimes we don’t know whether we should charge forward on our own or ask for help. Thankfully, there are some guidelines you can follow to know when you should go it alone—and when you should reach out for support.

If You’re Capable, But a Little Afraid—Go for It A little dose of fear keeps you motivated and helps you learn. If you’ve been given an assignment or responsibility that’ll stretch your abilities, but you have a pretty good idea of how to accomplish it, take it.

Professional challenges—like projects just a bit outside of your comfort zone —can lead to new opportunities and knowledge. While it’s true that you don’t want to commit to something you can’t follow through on, if there’s only a slight skills gap from having never done it before, challenge yourself to step up to the plate. That’s how you’ll learn.

But if You Don’t Understand the Project Parameters—Ask for Help If you flat-out do not understand what you’re being asked to do, you should *always* ask for clarification. It’s easy to feel pressure to project competence. But if you say, “Got it!” and head off with no clue what you’ve even been assigned, everyone will suffer in the end.

Whether your boss left you a cryptic memo or a client meeting was full of more clichés than clear feedback, if you don’t ask for clarification, your final efforts will disappoint.

So, reach out sooner rather than later. Try calmly repeating back what you think you heard: “What I’m hearing you say is that I should pull the new data before next Friday. Is that correct?” Then, let the other person correct you and clarify if necessary.

If Resources Abound and You Can Teach Yourself—Go for It So you’ve been given an assignment you’re not entirely sure about. Is it something plenty of people have done before? Have they written about it?

If yes, then do your research. A task that seemed beyond the pale for you may suddenly become a lot clearer after some time watching instructional YouTube videos and reading a few in-depth blog posts.

Before you tell your boss, “But, I’ve never _____!” Google how to do it. Keep in mind, if your manager is coming to you with a new task, it’s likely because there’s no go-to person on the team and she thinks it could be a good fit for you. You owe it to yourself to at least explore if this could be your new thing. (Bonus: Having an expert niche makes you more valuable.)

Truth talk: There’s no one-size-fits-all answer. But a little self-awareness and a heavy dose of common sense can usually point you in the right direction when you’re unsure whether to charge ahead independently or ask for help.